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ABSTRACT

The paper summarizes the first year (1983-84) of a 3-year rural education project entailing collaboration between the College of Saint Rose (Albany, New York) and rural chief school officers (CSOs) to improve service to handicapped students. Project objectives are listed: to improve education of mainstreamed handicapped students by helping CSOs plan staff development programs, utilize expertise of rural CSOs to improve preservice curriculum at the College, provide practicum and student teacher settings to address the unique needs of handicapped students in rural schools, provide preservice students the opportunity to serve as "rural interns," and provide a model program for other teacher training programs. Problems of serving handicapped children in rural areas are discussed. Project organization is described, including the orientation meeting with participating CSOs from 15 target school districts, and the first of 3 regional cooperative meetings between CSOs and high-level administrators from their districts, grant staff and consultants, and members of the College's Rural Task Force. Organization for the project's subsequent years is covered. Project results for the year are noted, including success as a catalyst and facilitator of inservice training to rural CSOs and formation of the Rural Task Force. The project's Needs Assessment Instrument is appended. (MH)

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A Collaborative Preservice Program Involving 15 Rural LEAs and The College of Saint Rose

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Rural Education Grant

The College of Saint Rose
432 Western Avenue
Albany, New York 12203

Paper presented at the Fourth Annual National Rural Special Education Conference in Murray, Kentucky, on March 29, 1984.

RC014656

Abstract

This paper summarizes the first year progress of the Rural Education Grant, "Collaboration of The College of Saint Rose and Chief School Officers to Improve Service to Handicapped Students," awarded to The College of Saint Rose, Albany, New York. The grant objectives, need for the grant, methods, results, and conclusions are discussed.

Introduction

This paper reports on the first year progress of U.S. Department of Education Grant No. G008301642 entitled "Collaboration of The College of Saint Rose and Chief School Officers to Improve Service to Handicapped Students." This is a three year project which is concerned with the education of handicapped students in rural school districts. It is intended to help rural Chief School Officers (CSOs) design staff development programs addressing the problems encountered by district and building personnel in meeting the educational needs of handicapped students. In addition, the project is designed to help The College of Saint Rose (CSR) Division of Education, improve preservice programming and teacher training to meet the needs of handicapped students in rural settings.

There are five main objectives:

1) to improve the education of handicapped students in regular classes by helping CSOs plan staff development programs;
2) to utilize the expertise of rural CSOs in local education agencies (LEAs) to improve the preservice curriculum at CSR, such that graduating teachers will have the skills to work more effectively with handicapped learners in rural school settings;
3) to provide practicum and student teaching settings in which the unique needs of handicapped students in rural school

districts are being addressed;

4) to provide preservice students the opportunity to serve as "rural interns" in selected rural school districts;

5) to provide a model program for other teacher training institutions.

The grant activities are directed toward CSOs, who will benefit from improved staff development programs, toward CSR education faculty and preservice education students, who will benefit from increased knowledge and skills about handicapped children in rural settings, and toward handicapped children in rural districts who will benefit from the improved training and skills of their teachers.

Need

The educational need expressed in this project can be traced directly to P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which mandates that handicapped children receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Although great strides have been made since 1976 in the implementation of the public law, most models for implementation have been developed in urban areas. According to Cole and Ranken (1981), the programs that successfully mainstream handicapped students into regular classrooms in urban districts are not always as successful in rural districts. Until recently, federal educational agencies have overlooked the differing needs of special education students in rural areas (Sher, 1978).

There are, however, several differences between rural and urban school districts. These difference can pose problems in the delivery of services to the handicapped children (Helge, 1981). Rural school districts have sparse populations, a lower incidence of students with handicapping conditions, and geographies which inhibit formal staff development programs and informal professional sharing. Negative and uninformed community attitudes toward the handicapped frequently result in less financial and community support for programs for the handicapped (Tunick, Platt, and Bowen, 1980). Teachers in rural areas must stretch available resources across many areas of exceptionality, as there are often insufficient numbers of students with a single handicapping condition to warrant creating separate classes or programs. According to Latham (1981), services to handicapped students in rural areas are further complicated by transportation factors, high absenteeism, and inconsistent attendance. Another consideration is the high per pupil cost of providing services to relatively few students (Office of Rural and Human Development, 1976).

Further complicating the delivery of services to handicapped students in rural areas is the difficulty in recruiting qualified personnel. While gathering data for the National Rural Research and Personnel Preparation Project, Helge (1981) found that 94% of the 19 states surveyed indicated that recruiting and retaining qualified staff for educating handicapped students were major problems for rural LEAs.

Some states had estimated an annual teacher turnover of 30%-50%, with almost complete turnover every three years. Sher (1978) suggested that new programs and courses should be created to generate a cadre of teachers prepared for the unique challenges of rural education. The needs and problems of rural educators and of teachers preparing for employment in rural settings for the basis for this project.

Methods

Located in Albany, New York, The College of Saint Rose is surrounded by counties which are predominately rural in nature. Using the New York State Education Department's public school enrollment figures for 1981-1982 and their publication, "School Districts' Classification by Community Type," 15 rural school districts located within Columbia, Rensselaer and Greene counties were selected to participate in the project. Five target school districts from each county were selected. Each county is referred to as a Region. Specifically, Columbia County represents Region I, Greene County represents Region II, and Rensselaer County represents Region III. The five objectives of the project fall under two main goals:

(1) to assist rural CSOs to design staff development programs addressing the problems encountered by district and building personnel in meeting the educational needs of handicapped students in regular classrooms, and

(2) to establish a teacher education program at CSR that produces

graduates with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to enable them to work productively and successfully with mainstreamed handicapped learners in classrooms within rural areas.

In order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the project, a Needs Assessment Instrument (see Appendix A) was developed and distributed to the CSOs in the participating districts, to determine appropriate locations, days, times and formats for future project meetings and activities.

On November 9, 1985, an orientation meeting with all the participating CSOs was held at CSR, to review grant objectives, to meet the grant staff, and to examine training priorities. Subsequent meetings were held with administrators from the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) and with each CSO in Region I to follow-up on the November meeting, and to further cement their support for the project and to specify inservice training needs for the first Regional Cooperative Meeting.

The first of three Regional Cooperative Meetings was held on March 5, 1984. Rural teams, consisting of CSOs and high level administrators from each of the five districts in Region I met with administrative representatives of the BOCES, grant staff, grant consultants and CSR Rural Task Force members. The CSR Rural Task Force was formed from Education Division volunteers, and it consists of eight faculty, one representing each of the education programs at CSR, i.e. Communication

Disorders, Educational Psychology, Elementary Education, Reading, Secondary Education, Special Education (Undergraduate Programs) and Special Education (Graduate Programs), plus the Student Teaching Coordinator. Additionally, the CSR Rural Task Force has two graduate student representatives. The agenda consisted of the following major topics: Mechanisms for Rural Inservice Activities Through BOCES, Working with the Learning Disabled Student at the Secondary Level, Mechanisms for Rural Inservice Through the Use of Consultants, and a Task Force Activity, where the CSR Rural Task Force met with administrators from the rural school districts to brainstorm preservice educational needs.

Subsequent Task Force meetings will be held to examine ways in which CSR can improve the attitudes, knowledge and skills of its preservice education students in working with handicapped children in rural areas. A major workshop is planned for June 1 and 2, 1984. Drs. Doris Helge and Larry Marrs from the American Council on Rural Special Education (ACRES), at Murray State University, in Murray, Kentucky, will meet with teams of rural administrators and board members to examine the issues related to rural special education, the identification of inservice needs in rural areas, and strategies for the delivery of inservice education in rural areas. The following day, they will meet with CSR faculty, Rural Task Force members, preservice students, and teachers from the participating districts, to consider the issues of mainstreaming in rural special education.

A model will be employed whereby each participating school district in Region I will receive consulting services in Fall, 1984, to aid in their planning and implementation of inservice programs for improving the delivery of educational services to handicapped children in mainstreamed settings within their districts. A Region II Cooperative Meeting will also be held in Fall, 1984. Its format and content will be similar in scope to that held for Region I.

In Spring, 1985, Region II school districts will receive consulting services, and Region III will have its Regional Cooperative Meeting. In Fall, 1985, Region III will receive consulting services. As a part of the model, the Regions will receive student teachers and rural interns from CSR.

Concurrently, during 1984-1985, the CSR Rural Task Force will be examining input received from the Rural Cooperative Meetings, and it will be making recommendations to the various CSR education programs. Recommendations will focus on attitudes, knowledge and/or skills needed by preservice teachers who may be serving handicapped students in rural areas. The grant staff has been assessing the CSR Education Faculty and the rural school administrative teams, for knowledge and attitudes toward handicapped children in rural areas, and will conduct an analysis of pre-and post-project differences.

Results

The grant has been successful in its role as a catalyst and facilitator of inservice training to CSOs in these rural areas and in developing a productive relationship with the BOCES Special Education Training and Resources Center (SETRC). In New York State, the BOCES SETRC is mandated and funded to provide inservice training to teachers in the area of educating children with handicapping conditions. The result has been joint sponsorship of the workshops to be held on June 1 and 2, 1984 by Drs. Helge and Marrs. Consistent with the grant objectives, CSR will provide teams of rural administrators and policy making personnel with information in order for them to become better consumers of inservice. The project has served as a catalyst for BOCES/SETRC to co-sponsor an inservice education program to teachers in the participating rural school districts, and CSR will be awarding each participant with a CEU (Continuing Education Unit) for their attendance at the workshop.

Another major grant outcome has been the formation of the Rural Task Force. Members of this task force, who represent each of CSR's seven education programs, have met with rural team members to explore ways to improve the delivery of preservice education to teachers involved with educating handicapped children in rural areas. Improving attitudes toward rural education, developing an understanding of rural communities, and obtaining a sensitivity toward rural problems

have tentatively been identified as areas for concern. The project has also generated baseline data on knowledge and attitude variables of CSR Education Faculty and rural school administrators. Additionally, it has provided CSOs from Region I with sets of available resources, addressing issues related to rural special education. Finally, it has generated mechanisms and procedures for surmounting many problems associated with delivering services to rural school districts which are spread out over a large geographic area.

A variable which has posed a problem for the project has been the difficulty in developing rural administrative teams, including school board members. In these rural areas, CSOs generally have no supporting administrators except for the building principals. (And in some school districts, the CSO is also a building principal.) Consequently, when the CSO leaves the district to attend a grant function, there are no other administrators remaining to run the district or the building(s). Often, the chair of the Committee for the Handicapped serves in two capacities, as chair of the committee and as building principal. Similarly, the curriculum coordinator may be either a building principal or a classroom teacher. School board members have limited time available, and some CSOs have political concerns regarding the participation of their school board in the grant. Although we feel that the participation of complete administrative teams is important,

due to their policy making status, total involvement of administrators and school board members on teams has not been as easy as we had thought.

Conclusion

Having experienced both the "agonies" and the "ecstacies" of our first year, we look forward to our second grant year. Overall, we have succeeded in capturing and maintaining the interest of 15 rural school districts. Working cooperatively with the BOCES/SETRC network, the grant has served as a catalyst for rural special education inservice. Additionally, the CSR Rural Task Force has started meeting as a group, and it has already met with CSOs and administrators from Region I. Mechanisms are in process for placement of student teachers and rural interns in the participating districts. We are still dealing with the problem of developing our rural administrative "teams." We look forward to working with the LEAs in Regions II and III and to developing alternative strategies for the inclusion of school board members as active participants in the rural teams.

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APPENDIX A: NEEDS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENT

District_____

Chief School Officer_____

The following questionnaire has been designed to help the CSR Grant Staff prepare a program that will contribute to the successful accomplishment of the grant Objectives. We appreciate your thoughtful responses. Please return the questionnaire to: The College of Saint Rose; Rural Education Grant; c/o Education Division; 432 Western Avenue; Albany, New York 12203, by August 20, 1983.

SECTION I: MEETING TIMES, PLACES, AND FORMAT

Please underline your preferences. More than one preference may be underlined in any category.

A. The most convenient meeting time(s) is (are):

1. morning (9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 11:00 a.m.)
2. early afternoons (1:00 p.m., 2:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m.)
3. late afternoons (4:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m.)
4. evening (6:30 p.m., 7:00 p.m., 7:30 p.m., 8:00 p.m.)
5. weekends (Saturday, Sunday)

B. Please list any days and times between October 15 and November 15, 1983 that you cannot attend a general meeting.

_____

C. The first meeting (date and time to be announced later) will be held at CSR. Thereafter, the most convenient place for group meetings is:

1. a participating "host" school in the Region
2. The College of Saint Rose
3. BOCES sites
4. other (specify):

D. For group meetings, the format(s) most conducive to learning is (are):

1. lecture presentation by experts
2. discussion sessions among participants
3. an even mix of lecture and discussion
4. hands on development of materials and methods
5. demonstration of materials and methods
6. other (specify):

E. We anticipate that future group meetings (to be held in a later phase of the grant) will require a six to eight hour time period. Which format do you prefer?

1. 2-2½ hour sessions, over a consecutive 3 day period
2. 2-2½ hour sessions, over a non-consecutive three day period
3. One-half day meetings, over a consecutive 2 day period
4. One-half day meetings, over a non-consecutive 2 day period
5. One full day of training

DIRECTIONS FOR SECTIONS II AND III: Rate the following items as to their importance to you, by circling the appropriate number, using the following rating scale. These ratings will be used to help plan agendas for future group meetings.

1 - Unimportant, inappropriate or irrelevant
2 - Below average importance
3 - Average importance
4 - Above average importance
5 - Very important, critical, or essential

SECTION II: NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN REGARD TO GRANT OBJECTIVE I: To improve the education of handicapped students in regular classes by helping CSOs plan staff development programs.

A. Staff Development Planning

1.	using outside consultants	1	2	3	4	5
2.	using in-house expertise e.g. special education teachers	1	2	3	4	5
3.	using BOCES resources	1	2	3	4	5
4.	using resources of other schools	1	2	3	4	5
5.	establishing in-house resource teams	1	2	3	4	5
6.	developing agendas for staff development and training	1	2	3	4	5
7.	selecting materials for staff development and training, e.g. films, articles	1	2	3	4	5
8.	techniques for facilitating	1	2	3	4	5
9.	techniques for clarifying attitudes toward the handicapped	1	2	3	4	5
10.	other agenda items (specify):					

B. Education for Learners with Handicapping Conditions

1.	description and symptomology of handicapping conditions	1	2	3	4	5
	a) physical handicaps	1	2	3	4	5
	b) mental retardation	1	2	3	4	5
	c) learning disability	1	2	3	4	5
	d) emotional handicaps	1	2	3	4	5
	e) communication disorders	1	2	3	4	5
	f) hearing handicaps	1	2	3	4	5
	g) visual handicaps	1	2	3	4	5
	h) other (specify):					
2.	instructional materials for handicapped learners	1	2	3	4	5
3.	instructional techniques for handicapped learners	1	2	3	4	5
4.	resources: federal, college, state, BOCES, parent groups	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Federal and State laws and regulations	1	2	3	4	5
6.	alternative testing techniques (state requirements)	1	2	3	4	5

B. Education for Learners with Handicapping Conditions

7.	parent-teacher-school relationships	1	2	3	4	5
8.	behavior management	1	2	3	4	5
9.	task analysis procedures	1	2	3	4	5
10.	other agenda items (please specify):					

SECTION III: NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN REGARD TO GRANT OBJECTIVE II: To utilize the expertise of rural CSOs in local education agencies to improve the preservice curriculum at CSR, such that graduating teachers will have the skills to work more effectively with handicapped learners in rural settings.

The following items are designed to help us assess your needs in order to help us effectively modify college curricula and accomplish Objective II.

A. Preparation for helping CSR staff:

1.	description of the preservice program at CSR	1	2	3	4	5
2.	copies of the competency based program descriptions	1	2	3	4	5
3.	discussions with faculty about the preservice program	1	2	3	4	5
4.	discussions with students about the preservice program	1	2	3	4	5
5.	visits to CSR, including observations of classes	1	2	3	4	5
6.	other (specify):					

SECTION IV: Please indicate any additional information you feel would be helpful to us at this time.

Author Notes

This project is supported by a grant from the United States Department of Education (Grant No. G008301642).

This is the first year of a three year project and we would like to interact and share with others involved in similar projects.

Please contact any of the grant staff for further information or sharing:

Dr. Ann Beth Sarachan-Deily, Director

Dr. Richard M. Medved, Coordinator

Dr. Richard T. Ognibene, Dean of Graduate and Continuing Studies, Co-Director

Dr. Philip E. Lyon, In-House Consultant

Dr. Pauline C. Grippin, Evaluator

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